The Virtual Construction of a Community that Normalizes Commercial Sexual Exploitation: A Mixed Methods Analysis

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Background

- A 2007 study conducted in 8 states estimated that the underground commercial sex industry generated $40 to $290 million.
- The internet has transformed and increased the availability and visibility of the commercial sex trade.
- The USA Sex Guide (SG), a free website used to educate men on how to buy sex with women, serves as an online training ground for those interested in the sex trade.
- Until recently, the men who fuel demand by buying sex and thus perpetuate sexual exploitation and prostitution, have remained invisible to researchers, policy makers, and law enforcement.

Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to explore how a commercial sex website facilitates the normalization of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) by building a virtual community of buyers.

Methods

- A content analysis of the postings of Illinois men who frequent the USA SG was studied for virtual community building strategies used to normalize commercial sexual exploitation.
- All internet postings displayed in all forums (BackPage Advertiser Reviews, Escort Classified Ads, News and Media Reports, Massage Parlor Reports, Escort Reports, General Reports, Strip Club Reports, Streetwalker Reports, Escort Classified Ads – Member Discussions, Craigslist Reviews, Ripoff Reports, and Truck Stop Reports) for Chicago during the months of January and February 2014 were collected and uploaded into Dedoose Cross Platform Application.
- Key words representing each theme were then searched and counted.

Results

- Posts Read = 777
- Excerpts Analyzed = 737
- Unique Posters = 448

Analysis

Credibility
- Relationship Building/Educating
- Normalizing Exploitation
- Common Language
- Social Structure

Percentage of Codes by Community Building Theme

Key Word Search Findings

- “Be safe” = 59
- “Be careful” = 18
- “Pimp” = 34
- “Hunt” = 25
- “Hobby” = 31
- “Spinner” = 10
- “Senior Member” = 11
- “RTFF” = 4

Definitions:
- Spinner – very petite, thin girl
- RTFF – read the f-ing forum!
- CBJ – covered blow job
- FS – full sex

Quotes Illustrating the Building of a Community that Facilitates CSE

Relationship Building / Normalizing Exploitation

“Most of the girls deeply dislike the work and perform only to meet the minimum standards. Because Hungary has no visa restrictions with the US, they have managed to create a system of bringing the bottom of the barrel performers to different US cities during a 90 day period.”

“Thank God you guys taught me to delay before play.”

Normalizing Exploitation

“A CBJ and no FS doesn’t do it for me.”

“First monger rule...Google the number. Second monger rule...RTFF (read what has gone on here over the last decade).”

Social Structure / Normalizing Exploitation

“I took one for the team but we all do right?”

“Brothers, I’m in need of an Asian fix and thinking of heading back your way soon. There’s 45 beautiful Asian gals listed on Eros guide today and I can’t believe there aren’t more reports. How’s a horny old guy supposed to choose unless there’s some good intel to help? Get out there and ball some Asians and due your civic duty to report back. Stay safe.”

Conclusion

- The volume and content of the posts on the Illinois section of the USA SG substantiates the use of the internet as a facilitator of prostitution and sexual exploitation.
- An anonymous online community of buyers of sex creates space to normalize the exploitation of an already vulnerable population.
- Increasing public awareness with research focused on the demand side of prostitution can serve as a catalyst for action.

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